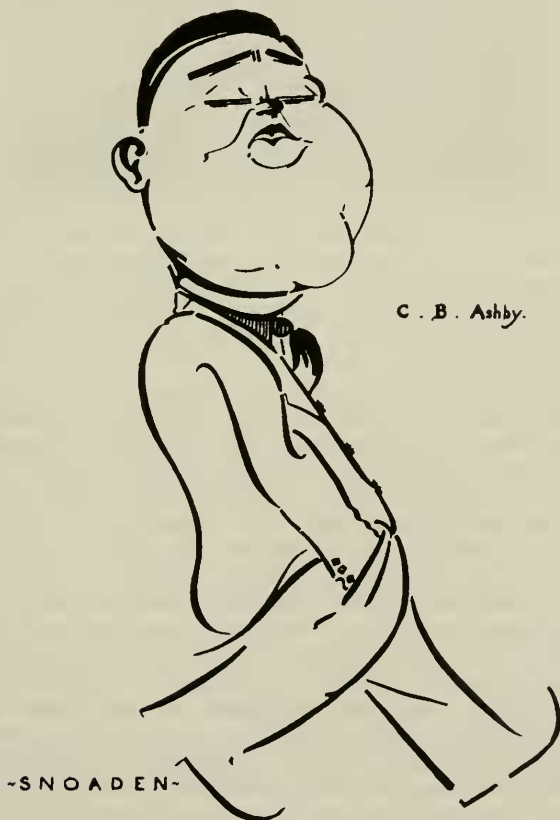


OBITUARY

CHARLES BRADWIN ASHBY 1920–1994

Charles Bradwin Ashby (known as 'Brad' for short) who died on 9 January 1994 joined the BENHS in 1965, known then as the South London Entomological and Natural History Society. Over the years he attended many of the indoor meetings and those in the field, when by that time his main interest lay in the Lepidoptera.

He was born on 13 June 1920 and lived his early years with his parents in West London. His father had an electrical business in the King's Road, Chelsea. At the age of ten the family moved to Carshalton, Surrey, and the following year young Brad entered the nearby Sutton Grammar School. The author of this obituary was at the same school and, though in a form lower, remembers Brad, not as a member of the school natural history society, but as a participant of the art group where a fellow artist drew the accompanying cartoon.



Cartoon of Brad Ashby by Snoaden, Art Group, Sutton Grammar School, 1936.

On leaving that school in 1937 Brad joined his father's business, attending night-school to obtain the Diploma of the Institute of Electrical Engineers. He took his final exams just at the outbreak of World War II. When it was time for him to be called for military service, his electrical qualification and experience were considered of sufficient consequence for him to be drafted into the services of the Ministry of Aircraft Production. At first Brad was based at their headquarters at Millbank on the Thames, but for most of the next five years he was sent up and down the country examining crashed aircraft. This, at times, became a very harrowing experience for him. He had, in each case, to assess what electrical faults, if any, might have contributed to the crash.

Soon after the end of the War in 1945, Brad was released by the Ministry and then rejoined his father's business which was still in the King's Road. When Ashby senior died, Brad took over, first as manager and then later as director of the firm. In 1985 he had been considering retirement at the end of that year, but decided to stay on until 1988 in order to celebrate the firm's one hundredth year of establishment.

Brad Ashby first became interested in natural history during World War II and his earliest leanings lay towards ornithology. In this connection he joined the London Natural History Society, becoming involved on its Ornithology Committee and serving on that of the *London Bird Report*, remaining with it until 1960. After the publication in 1957 of that Society's first edition of *The birds of the London area since 1900*, Brad turned his attention towards microscopy, ecology and entomology. To satisfy the first mentioned he joined the Quekett Microscopical Club, becoming particularly interested in the smaller denizens of pond life. For ecology and entomology he transferred his attentions in the LNHs from birds to the section that catered for these topics, at the same time seeking membership of the BENHS as has already been mentioned. In our Society he became increasingly absorbed in the Lepidoptera. With a friend he operated a mercury vapour moth lamp on Bookham Common, Surrey intermittently between the years 1965 and 1968. From this study he contributed a number of new moth records to Colin Plant's *Larger moths of the London area* (1993), on the cover of which appears Brad's colour photograph of the elephant hawk-moth.

Each year Brad and his wife Hilda took their annual holiday in Sweden, partly to visit their younger married daughter living there, and then to continue by motoring to distant parts of that country, watching birds and butterflies whenever possible. It was during one such yearly visit that Brad had the good fortune to be introduced to one of Sweden's leading lepidopterists, Stig Torstenius (also a member of our Society). This first meeting blossomed into a real friendship which brought about the presentation by Torstenius to the BENHS of a representative of each of Sweden's Lepidoptera from his own collection. At the end of each year's holiday Brad would bring back to England several store boxes of mounted specimens and Stig, when he came over here, would bring a similar amount. During the ensuing twelve months Brad would find the time to change, where necessary, the staging-pin size (and add further specimens mounted from Stig's papered reserve collection to fill any gaps), so that the whole could be re-arranged in Hill cabinet drawers set aside for this purpose by our Society's Council. Anomalies and difficulties in the nomenclature from earlier Continental lists were ironed out by Ashby, so that there is now a catalogue prepared by him for members subsequently using the collection. One cannot fail to appreciate the vast amount of work he put into getting the collection into working order, especially when one considers that it involved somewhere between three and four thousand specimens. It is an effort for which our Society can be forever grateful. The



C. B. Ashby 1920–1994.

story of this *Torstenius* collection was fortunately written up and published by Ashby in our Journal just before he died (*Br. J. Ent. Nat. Hist.* 7: 37–46, 1994).

Not only did he work hard on the *Torstenius* Lepidoptera collection, as has just been described, but he also gave considerable attention, when the time came, to detailing the arrangements for moving the Society's collections to Dinton Pastures. At our annual exhibition meetings he also gave much unsung assistance in ensuring that such functions ran smoothly. It was not unusual for him to turn up early for these meetings to help in setting up the tables for the exhibits, and he made certain that the slide equipment was in the right place at the right time. Furthermore, in his capacity as a member of both our Society and the LNHS, he made certain that arrangements for the annual joint meeting between the two organizations were satisfactory each year, presiding over several of these events on the appointed evening. When Stanley Jacobs died in 1989, Ashby's name was put forward at a BENHS council meeting as a successor trustee, to which post he was duly elected. While not carrying any additional work load, a trustee's rôle has an important obligation in the event of a society becoming insolvent.

Brad always had a particular bent for new gadgetry. The writer of this note recalls a delightful piece of Ashby 'Heath-Robinson' equipment, consisting of a veterinarian's hypodermic syringe taped to the end of a walking stick with a pull-string attached to the head of the plunger! This simple, though effective, piece of apparatus allowed samples of pond water to be taken at various depths. He retained this same inventive frame of mind to the end, for on 14 December 1993 he exhibited a 'home-made' but highly professional slide-viewer, constructed only a few weeks

before he died. With his death the Society has lost a respected member who did much on the side-lines of the BENHS—a difficult rôle to refill. The writer of this obituary notice misses a valued friend and a worthy field companion.

ERIC W. GROVES

EDITORIAL

MORE ABOUT LOGOS

Since the appearance of the last issue of the journal, and in particular my pontifications on the possible origins of the Society's logo, I have received various communications pointing out alternative identities for this mysterious creature. It was a postcard from Tony Irwin, which first alerted me to the possibility that the insect was a long-tailed zygaenid moth, possibly *Himantopterus fuscineris* Westw. This species is depicted (plate 46b) in *The dictionary of butterflies and moths in colour* by Allan Watson and Paul Whalley (1975, Michael Joseph Ltd; reprinted 1983, Peerage books) and it certainly looks very like the logo illustration. *Himantopterus* is a small genus of Indian and South-East Asian moths, all with very long hind wings; *H. fuscineris* is recorded from Java and Sumatra. The larvae are reputed to live with termites, but otherwise very little is known of this or others in the group.

A few days later, Mark Parsons thrust a small glass-topped box under my nose. In it was another long-tailed zygaenid, a *Doratomyza* species, this time from Africa. The close resemblance of this moth to the Society logo was noted by Martin Honey and, like many great entomological advances, was the result of a conversation during a staff coffee break at the Natural History Museum.

However, further evidence has emerged that the device is indeed *Nemoptera*. In the Council's report for 1967 (*Proc. Trans. Br. Ent. Nat. Hist. Soc.* 1968; 1: 16), when its availability was first announced, the tie is described as having "a simple motif, a neuropteran".

No matter what the insect is, the question still remains—why should Arthur Smith have chosen such an obscure insect to decorate the Society's tie? Perhaps someone out there has an idea.

It might be worth reporting here that the Society's council spent some time and energy in debating the exact form of the logo. At the time, everyone on council was firmly of the opinion that the insect on the tie was a species of *Nemoptera*, a mainly Mediterranean group related to lace-wings. In particular, it was thought to be *Nemoptera bipennis*, the species shown (page 107) in Michael Chinery's *Insects of Britain and western Europe* (1986, Collins). In asking Rob Dyke to redraw, it was suggested that the logo should be more life-like, so Rob carefully penned a more detailed figure accordingly.

However, it was only then noticed that *Nemoptera* had much broader and blunter wings than Smith's tie logo—a completely different design had resulted. What should the Society do? There were two alternatives: use Rob's new 'more accurate' depiction of *Nemoptera* or return to a version based on Smith's ties. The debate was finally resolved at the 1995 annual exhibition where a vote to use Smith's slim-winged insect was narrowly passed by the assembled council members. Given the mystery surrounding its origins, and argument on the animal's identity, it is perhaps just as well that we have retained Smith's design more or less unaltered.

RICHARD A. JONES